

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 11

U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT
8 October 1984

CURRENTS IN THE NEWS

War of Words Over Beirut Bombing

A flurry of finger pointing swept Washington amid signs that lax security may have paved the way for the latest U.S. Embassy bombing in Beirut.

Democrats argued that the Reagan administration should have learned enough from two Beirut attacks that cost 258 American lives last year to have prevented the September 20 bombing that killed two Americans and at least a dozen others at an embassy annex. Instead, Walter Mondale charged, President Reagan is "letting terrorists humiliate us, push us around and kill our people."

Even some of Reagan's allies were critical. Columnist George Will condemned administration "sloth" in Beirut. The attack, said the *Wall Street Journal*, "raises fundamental questions about the management of our national security and foreign affairs."

One question was this: Why did diplomats move from a building with strong protection to a structure that lacked such security features as reinforced walls, shatterproof windows, closed-circuit TV and a steel gate?

State Department officials explained that the neighborhood surrounding the new facility, in Christian East Beirut, was safer than the area the diplomats left in Moslem West Beirut.

Reagan, pressed about the delay in adding security measures, said: "Anyone that's ever had their kitchen done over knows that it never gets done as soon as you wish it would."

Later, as critics ridiculed his kitchen remark, the President called the attack a result of the "near destruction" of U.S. intelligence "before we came here"—a comment some aides initially described as criticism of former President Jimmy Carter.

That drew a rare rebuke from Carter, who called Reagan's remark "personally insulting and too gross . . . to ignore." He added: "This series of tragedies in the Middle East has been brought about by the President's own deeply flawed policy and inadequate security precautions in the face of proven danger."

A day later, Reagan telephoned Carter and said he didn't mean to blame him for a decline in intelligence-gather-



Once again, Americans clear debris at a Beirut embassy.

ing capability or for the Beirut attack.

The embassy-annex bombing also raised questions about the President's vow, first made last October, to dispense "justice" to Beirut's terrorist bombers. As recently as last spring, officials talked of retaliatory strikes.

Reprisal for the new bombing and the old ones remained an option, officials said, but no one appeared confident about where or whom to strike. A group calling itself the Islamic Jihad—or Holy War—claimed responsibility for all three attacks. But intelligence officers speculated that Jihad may be no more than a cover name for elusive terrorists operating without a command structure or a geographic base. □